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ABSTRACT

Intended to expose the oversimplifications and misrepresentations of popular readings of the Harlem Renaissance, this book reveals the truly composite nature of American literary culture. Noting that a broader sense of the intellectual context of the Harlem Renaissance has been missing from literary histories, the book supplies an appreciation of Boas's anthropology, Park's sociology, and various strands of pragmatism and cultural nationalism--ideas that shaped the New Negro movement and the literary field, where the movement flourished. The book tracks the resulting transformation of literary institutions and organizations in the 1920s (most of which were not located in academia and owe little to higher education), offering a detailed account of the journals and presses, Black and White, that published the work of the "New Negroes." The cultural excavation undertaken in the book discredits bedrock assumptions about the motives of White interest in the Harlem Renaissance, and about Black relationships to White intellectuals of the period. Also undertaken in the book is an investigation of the tensions among Black intellectuals of the 1920s. Analysis in the book shows that the general expansion of literature and the vogue of writing cannot be divorced from the explosion of Black literature often attributed to the vogue of the New Negro--any more than the growing sense of "Negro" national consciousness can be divorced from expanding articulations and permutations of American nationality. The book concludes with a full-scale interpretation of the landmark anthology "The New Negro." (NKA)

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